



Alienation (New Directions in Critical Theory)

By Rahel Jaeggi

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The Hegelian-Marxist idea of alienation fell out of favor after the postmetaphysical rejection of humanism and essentialist views of human nature. In this book Rahel Jaeggi draws on the Hegelian philosophical tradition, phenomenological analyses grounded in modern conceptions of agency, and recent work in the analytical tradition to reconceive alienation as the absence of a meaningful relationship to oneself and others, which manifests in feelings of helplessness and the despondent acceptance of ossified social roles and expectations.

A revived approach to alienation helps critical social theory engage with phenomena such as meaninglessness, isolation, and indifference. By severing alienation's link to a problematic conception of human essence while retaining its social-philosophical content, Jaeggi provides resources for a renewed critique of social pathologies, a much-neglected concern in contemporary liberal political philosophy. Her work revisits the arguments of Rousseau, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, placing them in dialogue with Thomas Nagel, Bernard Williams, and Charles Taylor.

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Editorial Review

Review

Through a compelling combination of acute analysis and rich phenomenological description, Rahel Jaeggi brings alienation back to the center of political philosophy. She argues alienation concerns a failure to appropriate oneself in the right way, a problem with how one comes to be what one is, rather than an inability to realize some pre-given identity. Jaeggi is not only thoroughly learned in both the continental and analytic traditions. She does what is quite rare: she brings these traditions into a highly productive synthesis. A very impressive achievement.

(Daniel Brudney, University of Chicago)

With this masterful reconstruction of the concept of alienation, Jaeggi opens fruitful new avenues for critical theory. She also claims her place as a powerful exponent of social philosophy and a thinker of the first rank. Her book is a tour de force of cogent argumentation and rich phenomenological description.

(Nancy Fraser, The New School)

Alienation, the concept Hegel and Marx made so central to European political and social thought, has receded in importance in recent political philosophy. Like self-deception and weakness of will, it is extremely resistant to analysis even though it continues to be a major theme of modern life and accounts for the features of contemporary life. Jaeggi's great accomplishment is to provide the outlines of a new theory of an old term and thereby show its linkage to major ethical and political concerns. With this book, an entire tradition of political and social philosophy receives a new lease on life.

(Terry Pinkard, Georgetown University)

Jaeggi's scholarship and writing in this book is excellent, and the resuscitation of the concept of alienation in critical social theory is a welcome event in the literature.

(Matthias Fritsch, Concordia University)

Alienation is one of the most exciting books to have appeared on the German philosophical scene in the last decade. It not only rejuvenates a lagging discourse on the topic of alienation; it also shows how an account of subjectivity elaborated two centuries ago can be employed in the service of new philosophical insights.

(Frederick Neuhouser, Barnard College)

This insightful and learned book will appeal to anyone interested in social philosophy.

(*Library Journal*)

Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* is an important contribution to – and rejuvenation of – the philosophical literature on the phenomenon of alienation.

(*Marx & Philosophy Review of Books*)

[A]n excellent representative of the work of a new generation of German philosophers who...seem well positioned to reanimate Western philosophy.

(Frederick Neuhouser *Review of Metaphysics*)

About the Author

Rahel Jaeggi is professor of social and political philosophy at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her research focuses on ethics, social philosophy, political philosophy, philosophical anthropology, social ontology, and critical theory.

Users Review

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Shirley Gilliam:

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